

INT. BACKSTAGE AT DAILY GRIND OPEN MIC - NIGHT

Opening titles come and go over black while a performance from a singer/songwriter plays beautifully.

Playing fades into a muffled tone as James CHELERE (Shell-a-ray), a late-20s/early 30s, leans side to side in the shadow of the curtain. When he's not wiping sweat away, his hands tremble.

Through the curtain he sees that this bar isn't crowded, but that doesn't matter. His cheeks puff as he breathes. Faster. Deeper. He turns to the green glow of the exit sign.

SUDDEN APPLAUSE snaps his head back to look at the stage. The announcer, BARRY, 40s, a rotund happy guy, steps past James and approaches the mic as the performer steps off stage and into the audience.

BARRY

Craig August, everyone. (beat) Next up, we have one of our regulars, Mr. Curt Capelle.

CURT CAPELLE, late-20s/early 30s, startles James again as he walks by. Curt gives Barry a hug, then sits center stage. Barry exits the stage and walks past James.

CURT

Thanks Barry. Craig is joining me for this one. How are you folks doing? (Applause) [continued rambling muffles out]

The audience enjoys Curt. Laughter. Clapping. The playing begins. The muffled sound BREAKS as someone puts a hand on James's arm. He jolts, then turns around to see Barry.

Barry

James Chu-ler-ree, right?

James shakes his head, "Yes".

James

Chelere.

Barry

I'll never get that right. You're up next. Stick around this time, okay?

James gives a nervous nod, then looks up to the green exit sign behind Barry. Barry releases, then pats his arm. James looks back out on stage.

James

(whispering to himself)

...stick around, stick around...

Any sort of confidence James had drains from his face as Curt continues to sing.

James (CONT'D)

(whisper/singing)

...stick around, stick....

As Curt finishes out his song, it's followed by roaring applause over a steel door opening, then squeaking to close. James is gone.

ext. City Streets - same night

James, with a guitar case on his back, makes the long walk across the frame. SHOW TITLE: COVER ME. The audio over this clip is the announcer mixed with James:

Barry

Next up we have James Chu-ler-ree. (beat) Are you back there? Well, in the meantime, how about another applause for Curt!

James

(whisper/singing)

...stick around, stick around...

Light applause briefly carries on to the next scene.

int. James'S apartment - same night

The door closes (ending applause abruptly). The apartment is dark, but a dim light shows part of his silhouette. He takes a moment to sigh and shakes his head with regret.

He turns on the lights. Walls are covered in notebook paper containing beautiful art, poems, and song lyrics. He ignores it all as if it were beige paint on drywall.

James (CONT'D)

(whisper/singing)

...stick around, stick around...

He puts down his guitar case on a floor stand then sits on the edge of his mattress/boxspring combo and hangs his head between his arms. The singing stops. A moment later, he gets up and grabs a large notebook from a stack of them on his bookshelf. He tosses it on the bed, unsheathes his guitar, then

plops back down on the bed. After a deep breath, he strums a tune that comes with ease. The lyrics include "Stick Around". The music, less lyrics, carry over to the next scene.

EXT. neighborhood streets - day

The sun has just peeked over the horizon, and a helmeted James is on his bike with a bag of papers tossing them at doors and doing the occasional hand off to anyone waiting for him to come by. Part of the ride takes him through the city - where he passes a wall full of fliers. With one newspaper remaining, he slows his bike down as he arrives at a trailer home with a porch.

EXT. SAM's Trailer - same DAY

He leans his bike on the trailer, puts his helmet on it, then grabs that last paper. SAM, mid/late 30s, tired, lean man in a robe, tank top, and pajama pants is sitting on the porch with coffee in hand and a cigarette in the other. James quickly separates a part of the paper out from the rest of it.

James

Good morning.

James drops the remaining newspaper into Sam's lap, then enters the house. Sam follows.

INT. SAM'S TRAILER - SAME DAY

Sam's home is a typical trailer, complete with wood paneling and carpet. It's a bit messy, but can still be navigated. James takes a seat at the couch. Sam tosses the newspaper into the trash as James thumbs through the classifieds.

JAMES

I don't want to be a telemarketer. I don't want to sell a car. And I certainly don't want to participate in your schemes, people.

Sam begins to open the bread to prepare breakfast.

SAM

If you're serious, go out and find something.

JAMES

There's nothing out there.

SAM

Then just get a different job that you're too old for. Go open up a lemonade stand. Cause I could use that. Toast?

JAMES

Yeah.

On the table next to Sam's coffee, James observes a sobriety chip on the table. "9 months sober". He rubs it between his fingers. Sam loads the toaster with bread.

SAM

I went door to door til someone said "yes". Anything is better than being a paper boy. Sorry - paper man.

James

I'm done for the day, and you'll be changing oil til the sun goes down.

SAM

I don't know how you afford rent with a job like that.

James

No car insurance. No gas.

SAM

Keep saving. Don't spend that money from Dad. Fuck. If I had that, things would be different. Wouldn't be in this shit hole, you know?

The toaster bread pops out of the toaster.

SAM (CONT'D)

You want jelly or butter?

James

Do you have jam? Or preserves?

SAM

What's the difference?

James

Between jam and preserves; or either of those to jelly?

The refrigerator seems to hums loudly as Sam gives a blank stare awaiting any answer. James drops the chip on the table, then grabs his own sweaty shirt; looks down at it.

James

Butter's fine. I guess I've earned it.

Sam closes the refrigerator and begins to apply the butter.

Sam

Mom's been asking me to send her a video of you playing at one of your concerts. If I knew where it was, I probably would have went.

James

They just ran out of space for me.

SAM

So you didn't play.

Sam has hear it before. After buttering the bread, he adds it to the plate with the coffee cake, then brings it to James. Sam sits back down, by his own coffee and sobriety chip.

James

She doesn't want to come see for herself? She gets her nails done twenty minutes from here every week.

SAM

She can make appointments for that.

James shakes his head, confused. Sam leans in, carefully speaking.

SAM (CONT'D)

She doesn't want to make the drive unless she knows you're gonna go through with it. So you got a little stage fright. Hell, everyone's got it to some degree. I couldn't do it.

James

I told you, they didn't put me on, so it doesn't matter.

A moment while Sam searches for the words.

SAM

Have you ever thought about talking to someone about that?

JAMES

About what?

SAM

I don't know, about everything?

JAMES

Like a therapist?

SAM

No, not like a therapist. A therapist.

JAMES

Why can't I just talk to you?

SAM

I don't have the answers. I'm your brother. You can look to me to figure out what not to do. So take a good look at me - I gave up music, remember? Don't do that.

JAMES

You're doing fine without it.

SAM

I want you to do better than fine. You could do something with that. Every day you check those classifieds, but you don't want any of that shit.

Sam sits back in his chair. He picks up the chip and begins to play with it, running it over his fingers.

SAM (con't)

Don't spend all of that time working on something just to throw it all away.

A beat while James observes Sam.

James (CONT'D)

How does it feel?

Sam tosses it at James.

SAM

You wouldn't think something so small would be so damn important. (beat/toss) It scares me when I think about life before all that.

James tosses chip back at Sam. He catches it.

James (CONT'd)

Don't think about it.

ext. COURTYARD TO James's apartment - same day

James parks his bike and proceeds to lock it to the stair's railing. While messing with the lock, Curt Capelle walks by holding a box and a duffel bag on his shoulder. He gives James the "cool guy nod". James is quick to return one of his own (which doesn't come off nearly as cool), followed by a look of curiosity.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James sits bedside with legs crossed. His guitar sits beside him with the guitar bag on the floor below. He puts a hand on his guitar, then looks at the wall he now shares with Curt. He gets up and approaches the wall cautiously.

He puts his ear to the wall. Nothing; not a sound. A while longer. Still nothing.

Suddenly, a toilet flush causes James to jump away from the wall. LAURA GUIDRY, mid/late 20s.

JAMES

Laura! Jesus, what are you doing?

LAURA

I was using the bathroom.

James

Get over here.

James waves her over.

LAURA

Here we go.

They stand very close to the wall.

JAMES

Let's pretend we're having a conversation.

LAURA

We are having a conversation.

James

One where he can hear us.

LAURA

Last time we did this you bought me dinner.

JAMES

How do you remember that? That was years ago.

LAURA

It stuck out in my mind.

James

Fine. But start up a new conversation.

LAURA

There's another open mic night tomorrow.

James

A different conversation.

LAURA

We could go. I finally have two nights off in a row.

James and Laura get a little more quiet than before, given the topic and their distance between each other.

James

I'm not going to do that.

LAURA

You don't have to play. We could just listen. You never want me to go when you go.

JAMES



(motioning to the wall)

He plays there. He gave me that cool guy nod. You know, like this?

James gives his own uncool version of the cool guy nod, jerking his chin up and down. This carries on longer than it should, til Laura receives a text.

LAURA

Oh, it's from your mom.

James

(frustrated, crescendo)

She's getting to everyone. I wish she'd drop it. I don't need to play any of this. Life goes on either way.

LAURA

Maybe she's jealous.

JAMES

Why?

Playful.

LAURA

Because you play for me all the time. These are all mine.

JAMES

Oh, all yours, huh?

James gets close to Laura and begins to tease her, tickling in random spot.

JAMES (CONT'D)

How about this? Is this yours? How about a trade?

Laura laughs as he continues.

JAMES (CONT'D)

A little louder.

LAURA

What?

JAMES

So he can hear. Just... Just start laughing loud!

They both begin to loudly fake laugh. Back and forth, bigger and bigger laughs! James starts HAMMERING on the wall with his fist. Then puts his head against the wall. More LOUD LAUGHS.  
Cut to:

EXT. DOORWAY TO CURT's APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

The door quickly opens revealing James standing behind Laura. Curt's entire vibe is the overly nice, artistically focused hipster. He has a guitar case in one hand.

CURT

Hey guys, how's it going?

LAURA

Hi! We're from next door, and we noticed we were getting a little loud, so we found this to be the perfect opportunity to introduce ourselves and apologize for all of the noise.

CURT

Noise never hurt anyone! I'm Curt.

LAURA

I'm Laura, and this is James.

James nods. Curt puts down the guitar case.

James shakes his hand the only way he knows how - jerking up to the shoulders, and back down - one time.

CURT

Pleasure. Which apartment are you from?

James points while Laura speaks.

LAURA

James is in one sixty four. I don't live here, but I'm there from time to time.

Curt

Very cool, very cool. I was just about to head out.

Curt picks up his guitar and walks out of the apartment.

LAURA

Oh, no, we just wanted to say hi and apologize about the noise on our way out as well.

Curt locks the door.

Curt

I appreciate that. I'm sure we'll talk later. Thanks for stopping by.

LAURA

Sure! Bye.

Curt gives Laura a fist bump with his free hand, and gives James a "cool guy" head nod. James returns with his own uncool guy nod. James continues it after Curt has turned and walked away. James's eyes go from the back of Curt's head to Laura's eyes - he stops.

They watch Curt make his way through the courtyard. Laura turns back to James. She smiles playfully, and James raises his eyebrows at Laura.

LAURA

You don't say much.

JAMES

I don't say much.

Beat.

James

This is why I need you.

LAURA

And that is why you need me!

James looks at her, as he cracks a goofy smile.

James

Should we go out now?

LAURA

We should.

Laura proceeds to walk away from the doorway. James follows.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREETS - NEXT DAY

James rides throughout the neighborhood, as he does, delivering papers. He approaches an intersection and waits to cross. A PROMOTER hands him a flyer to promote a show by the band "SHYLIGHT SURVIVORS". He briefly looks down at the flyer, then notices the wall nearby is covered with the same flyers. Next to the grouping are other ads.

The BRIGHT LIGHTS are COMING! THE END IS NEAR!

WANTED: CRIMINAL BY THE NAME OF RED X.

and other references from films. ;)

"Ready for a change?".

Then some smaller text below it. It reads, "Free therapy sessions for a limited time. This is the only flyer I put up in town, so its simply fate that you have found it. Fate speaks! You listen. Tear off a number before it's too late. Then take the next step and call that number before it's REALLY too late." He removes his backpack and puts the band's flyer in it. The bottom of the sheet is covered by one of the band's flyers. James lifts it to see that all the numbers are still there. He rips one off. The promoter puts the remaining fliers up on the wall.

James

A flyer for therapy...

PROMOTER

Amazing what you can find when you're really looking.

The promoter walks to her car and opens the door.

PROMOTER

See you at the show!

James rides on through the crosswalk.

ext. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - SAME DAY

James turns off the busier roads and into a neighborhood. As it gets more quiet, he eventually stops the bike. He removes his backpack and pulls out his cellphone. He removes the flyer number from his

pocket. He calls the number.

Ring.

JAMES

(to himself)

I hope this is a fucking joke.

Ring.

JOELLEN (O.S)

Hello?

James

Hi, I found your flyer downtown.

JOELLEN (O.S)

What flyer?

James

A... therapy flyer. On the corner of 4th and Laurel.

Short pause.

JOELLEN (O.S)

Damnit. That's an old flyer.

James

I didn't see an expiration.

JOELLEN (O.S)

What's your name?

James

James.

JOELLEN (O.S)

James. Okay. Why don't you come by and we'll talk?

James

Is it still free?

JOELLEN (O.S)

Maybe. Just come by.

James

Well, I can't do it unless its free.

EXT. SAM'S TRAILER - SAME DAY

James sits on the couch with the classifieds in hand once again.

James

Could I borrow your car?

SAM

Did you get a flat tire or something?

JAMES

No, I think I found someone to talk to.

SAM

Oh? Okay! Yeah.

Sam jumps out of his chair.

SAM (CONT'D)

Who is this person?

Sam gets the keys from the wall.

JAMES

I don't know, but I'm not getting my hopes up. They're cheap, so I'm giving it a shot.

SAM

That's great! You should be more excited. Those people have a way of prying your brain open and have you thinking in a whole new light.

Sam hands the keys to James, then sits.

JAMES

How would you know?

SAM

Come on, Jimmy. I was a mess. You think I didn't see a therapist through any of that?

JAMES

I like to think I cleaned up a lot of your mess.

SAM

You did.

JAMES

A therapist wasn't over here keeping you sober and taking you to AA.

SAM

No - but like I said - brothers don't have all the answers.

JAMES

How will you get to work?

SAM

I'll get a friend to pick me up.

JAMES

What friend?

SAM

A friend. Don't worry about it. I can have friends.

JAMES

You always pick the wrong friends.

SAM

You're not wrong about that, but I think this one's okay.

James looks up to the clock then stands.

JAMES

I'll be back before you have to go to your meetings.

SAM

Fine. Listen - don't hold back. You're there to open up, okay?

James nods.

JAMES

K.

ext. The doorway of JoEllen Foster. - SAME DAY

James arrives in his Sam's car at a generic home. He approaches the door.

Knock, knock, knock.

Barking is heard from inside. James hears JoEllen inside.

JoEllen

Come on, Buddy, that ain't the mailman. Take it easy.

JoEllen Foster, a woman in her 30s, opens the door. She is wearing glasses and mismatched clothing. Her hair is up but still a mess.

JoEllen

Are you James?

The dog sniffs James in the doorway.

James

Yeah.

JoEllen

I'm JoEllen.

James shakes JoEllen's hand. Up once, down once.



JoEllen (Cont'd)

Come on in.

James enters.

INT. THE HOME OF JoEllen Foster. - SAME DAY

James enters into a common enough home. It's a bit messy.

JoEllen

Welcome to my office. Have a seat wherever. You want coffee?

James

No.

James heads for the couch and takes a seat. JoEllen goes into the kitchen to make herself a cup of coffee.

JoEllen

How about water or something?

JAMES

I'm okay for now.

James looks around the home and observes his surroundings. The mess. Random papers. Picture frames with the stock footage families in them. The dog.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Do you get a lot of visitors?

JOELLEN

Lots.

She observes him looking around - where he looks.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

Are you nervous?

JAMES

No. (beat) Well, a little.

JOELLEN

So what got you here?

JAMES

I found that flyer.

JOELLEN

I know that. What made you want to call the number?

JAMES

Oh. well... (interrupted)

JoEllen, coffee in hand, loudly drags a chair stool from the bar-high table to the couch. James returns a quizzical look. JoEllen sits with the chair backwards.

JoEllen (CONT'D)

We normally sit at the table.

James

Should I move?

JoEllen

Nah, I'm just keeping my distance in case you're a psychopath.

JoEllen sips her coffee calmly. James is more nervous and moving in his seat.

James (CONT'D)

So what do I talk about?

JOELLEN

You could answer my question from before. (beat as James doesn't recall) Why did you call?

JAMES

Oh right. I guess I'm just trying to open up.

JOELLEN

Then open up.

JAMES

I don't know what to say.

JoEllen

Literally anything, James.

JAMES

Are you always this pushy?

JOELLEN

When I'm not being paid to be nice.

JAMES

So this is free?

JoEllen sighs.

JOELLEN

Maybe. Forget about that and tell me why you're here.

JAMES

I have... stage fright.

JoEllen

Here's what you do. Don't go on stage.

James

I've been avoiding it.

JoEllen

Then what's the problem?

James

Everyone thinks I shouldn't avoid it.

JoEllen

Who's everyone?

James

Friends. Family. Fiance.

JoEllen

Those damn "F" words every time.

James

I sign up to play guitar at open mic nights, but I always feed myself some excuse to take off before my name is called.

JoEllen (CONT'D)

You play piano?

James

Yeah.

JoEllen

Then play it.

She tilts her head in the direction of the piano.

James

No... No thanks.

JoEllen

This isn't a stage, James. There's not an audience hiding in the back.

James

I don't play well in front of strangers.

JOELLEN

What makes me stranger?

JAMES

Anyone who doesn't know me is a stranger, I suppose.

Beat.

JOELLEN

Well, this is a predicament.

JAMES

What is?

JOELLEN

My fee is normally one fifty an hour. But I will honor my flyer since you found it.

James

So it is free?

JoEllen

Yeah, but I'll tell you this: I'm much nicer to the people who pay.

EXT. SAM'S TRAILER - SAME EVENING. Dusk.

James returns to Sam's trailer to find MIRANDA, skinny and attractive, but strung out looking early twenty something, on the porch with Sam while they smoke and chat. He parks next to her car then exits the car.

JAMES

Is this that friend?

James approaches, then places Sam's keys in Sam's hand.

SAM

(To Miranda)

This is my brother, James. He's the good one.

She laughs.

MIRANDA

I'm Miranda.

James nods.

SAM

How'd it go?

James looks at Miranda, then back at Sam.

JAMES

Fine. So you're about to go to your meeting, right?

SAM

I'm riding with her and we're going to grab a bite after. Wanna join?

Sam has a "new love" smile on his face.

James

No... I've got some stuff I gotta work on.

SAM

Oh yeah, I remember that feeling!

Sam turns to Miranda.

SAM

Did you get that "everything must change" feeling the first time you did those therapy sessions?

JAMES

She doesn't need to know that.

SAM

We're in the same boat. She's done it too.

MIRANDA

I did, but I didn't feel anything.

JAMES

I gotta go.

SAM

Take it easy, bro. Go change your life!

Miranda and Sam laugh.

SAM

(to Miranda)

I'm serious!

James faintly hears that as he rides away.

EXT. James'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

James is locking up his bike. Curt exits his apartment, leans his guitar near the door, then begins to lock up. James tries to be quiet as he enters his own apartment.

CURT

Hey, James!

James makes an effort to be like Curt.

JAMES

Hey Curt!

CURT

Do you remember me? From the Grind. Open mic night?

JAMES

You know, I think I do!

CURT

You still go there?

JAMES

From time to time. How about you?

CURT

Yeah. Less these days. I've got a paying gig playing in a few hotels around town.

JAMES

Ah, yeah. How'd you come about that?

CURT

You just gotta go out there and get it, you know?

JAMES

Oh yeah, I know. Get it. Right on.

CURT

It pays the bills. Do you gig too?

JAMES

Yeah. I gig. Probably not as much as you, but I gig here and there.

CURT

Cool man - hey, look - if you aren't doing anything later, I've got some friends coming by - You should come. Call it a housewarming. Bring Laura and any our neighbors around here.

James

Us talking right now is the most I've talked to any of my neighbors.

CURT

It's time for a change then.

James

I'll mention it to Laura. You know, we'll see.

CURT

Okay man, stay cool.

James

I'll do my best.

Curt walks away through the courtyard. James watches him leave. Envy.

EXT. DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James looks through the window of the Grind. The stage is dark. He looks at the sidewalk.

James sits down on a bench a few feet from the door, sits, opens his guitar case, puts the guitar on his knee, leaves the case open for tips. He sits looking down at his guitar for a long while. His left hand



makes the motions, but his right hand holds the strings, not allowing sound to escape.

Sound silences awaiting music that never comes. The silence is broken as a PASSER-BY exits the shop. He lights a cigarette and/or checks his phone.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

You gonna play?

James

I'm warming up.

The passer-by tosses a dollar into the case.

PASSER-BY

All right. You better be good.

The passer-by continues to smoke and/or check his phone while James continues making motions but no sounds.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

You gonna play sometime tonight?

James

(quietly)

Yeah.

The frustrated passer-by snatches his money back out of the case.

James (CONT'D)

Sir, please.

PASSER-BY

I'ma get me some coffee inside. Be warmed up when I come out here.

The passer-by goes inside. James closes his eyes, trying to psyche himself up for the moment. Deep breath. Deep breath. A man, GABE LARSON (60s), well-dressed, exits the Grind and begins to walk away from the shop. The door to the Daily Grind opens back up immediately. The passer-by approaches James.

PASSER-BY (CONT'D)

Man, close the case and get some cardboard and a Sharpie.

The frustration of the Passer-By grabs Gabe's attention. He approaches James after the passer-by leaves.

GABE

I couldn't talk til I was in high school.

James has an attitude as he goes on the defensive.

James

I can talk fine.

GABE

But that voice doesn't mean as much to you as that voice, does it?

Gabe points at James' face and then at the guitar. James' attitude changes as this guy might have good advice.

GABE

When I finally spoke up, I had a lot to say. It took me places. Now I don't know if you're any good - or if you can play at all. But when its your time to speak, you'll know it.

Gabe reaches into a money clip.

GABE

Have a good night.

Gabe drops a twenty dollar bill in the guitar case, then walks away. James is upset at himself. He kicks the case shut.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME night

James and Laura sit on the couch, watching television. James begins to sing to himself.

JAMES

Close the case... just close the case...

LAURA

Do you need a notebook?

James takes a moment.

JAMES

Nah.

James begins to hum the same tune.

LAURA

I'll get you a notebook.

Laura gets up from the couch and into the bedroom.

JAMES

No, I don't need one.

LAURA

(From other room)

But that sounded nice.

JAMES

I'd rather forget about it.

She returns.

LAURA

Come on. What's up?

JAMES

I did a lot of things today that I don't do. But change is suppose to be good, isn't it?

LAURA

It can be.

JAMES

I don't want these... these limits.

James gets up from the couch and points at the walls.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can talk to someone in their face, but I can't be me. I've been this way for most of my life. I'm the same kid you met in high school.

LAURA

I like that kid in high school.

JAMES

But that was over a decade ago. I have to change.

LAURA

Playing in front of strangers is your answer?

JAMES

It's all that I have to give.

Laura stands up to James.

LAURA

You're not smiling as much as you used to. If that's part of changing, then I don't want you to change.

James lifts his head and looks around the room.

JAMES

I should take all of this stuff down.

LAURA

No, this makes this place you. Maybe we should just get away from here.

James looks back to Laura.

LAURA (CONT'D)

How's that for a change?

JAMES

I don't think that's the answer.

Laura turns to the windows as a group walks by.

LAURA

Looks like your neighbor is having his first party.

James

He's having a housewarming thing.

LAURA

Oh really.

James

Yeah, he invited both of us -

LAURA

- We should go!

James

(making up something quick)

I don't know, I need to write this song...

LAURA

Be different! You wanted change, right?

Laura takes the notebook back to the bedroom.

LAURA (CONT'D)

(From bedroom)

Put on your shoes! Let's go be social.

James remains still, reluctant to prepare.

int. Curt's Place - SAME NIGHT

There are about ten people here, including Curt. Curt's crowd = hipsters. They are all sitting around Curt while he tells stories.

Music is coming lightly from the stereo - something like Arcade Fire - Wake Up. Curt recalls this tale like any heart touching moment.

CURT

(to crowd)

... But she couldn't get a hold of anyone. The cashier was just completely unsympathetic - his face said "someone get this old lady out of my store", so I spoke up and asked her if she needed a ride home. And the poor thing could barely hear me, so she was already confused. She said "Are you a taxi service?"

Laura and James enter into the apartment.

CURT (CONT'D)

And I said "No ma'am, but I'd love to help and give you a ride home. So I gave her a ride home, which happened to be in this complex, and that's how I found the place. And that's what life is all about.

The crowd agrees. The women "awww", and the men nod in approval.

LAURA

Hey, thanks for the invite!

CURT

You're welcome, thanks for coming! Everyone, this is Laura and James, my neighbors to the right. Laura, James - this is everyone!

EVERYONE

[Hello's and Hi's]

James and Laura return casual hellos.

CURT

We were just talking about how I found this place. (To James) How'd you find yourself here?

James

(beat) Classifieds.

Long beat as Curt's friends aren't as impressed by this story.

CURT

Who needs refills?

Curt collects empty bottles, then heads to the kitchen. While doing so, James turns to Laura.

James

(To Laura)

These people smell funny.

LAURA

Be nice.

James

I'm just gonna go wait at home.

LAURA

(harsh whisper)

Don't leave here!

The rest of the crowd return to each other's company, and Laura joins in one.

LAURA

Oh I love your scarf, did you make that? (continue drive)

James is left standing alone but surrounded by group now preoccupied with each other.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CURT'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

James walks outside of Curt's place. He has a "red solo cup" in hand. White Christmas lights shine on the facade, a few chairs and Curt's guitar. James looks at it, then plucks down the strings. He immediately looks around to see if anyone heard him. He closes the door to the apartment. He sits down, puts his cup down, grabs the guitar and begins to play. He hums along with what he's playing, trying to fit words as well.

James

...Close the case, get some cardboard...

Curt appears behind James in the window - which is open. He overhears James's guitar playing. Beautiful. A HIPSTER VISITOR walks into the kitchen. We hear this slightly muffled through the window.

HIPSTER VISITOR

Hey Curt, where do you keep the good beers?

James's nerves take over as he grips the neck to mute the sound.

CURT

Bottom shelf.

Curt disappears from the kitchen window and walks outside and takes a seat next to James.

CURT

Don't stop. I'm not done listening.

James

Sorry, I should have asked if I could use your guitar.

James attempts to put the guitar back, but Curt puts his hand in front of it, forcing it to stay in James's lap.

CURT

It's no problem. What were you playing?

James

Nothing - just playing around.

CURT

Please, play it again.

James

I don't know. My fingers just started hurting, and it's been a while since I've played. You should play something.

Curt can see James getting more and more nervous. He decides to not push for it anymore.

CURT

Okay, I'll play a bit. But you have to stay and give me some pointers. I'm just a chord player.

James

That covers just about everything on the radio.

Curt begins to play some simple stuff.

James

You got that. You're playing just fine.

CURT



I appreciate that. I could always use some lessons from a good teacher.

James

I'm no teacher.

CURT

Anyone can teach those willing to learn.

Beat.

James

What do you like to do when you're not here entertaining your friends and neighbors?

CURT

I'm a street artist.

James

Ah, of course you are. (beat) Where do you... do that?

CURT

I keep around the levee. Sometimes over by the university.

James takes a drink.

CURT

(cont'd)

It's fulfilling. The pay's unsteady. But I had a nine to five once. Then life has a way of letting you know you're doing it all wrong.

Curt smiles and shakes his head. James endures.

CURT

So I'm trying to get more into music - Just singing though. I just jumped on board with a cover band called Red Light. Heard of 'em?

James

Nope.

CURT

Typical covers for now, nothing special. Still not making money, but we've got some things lined up. Are you in a band?

James

I used to play with my brother. Not really a band per say. More like just goofing around.

Curt nods in agreement.

James (CONT'D)

He was really good about finding my sound. I wouldn't have to tell him much. He just knew how to go with it, as if he wrote the songs with me. But, he sold his drums a few years back, so we don't do that anymore.

CURT

You always write and play your own stuff?

James

Yeah. I've got notebooks and papers just full of lyrics. But there isn't an audience for the kind of stuff I write.

CURT

What genre?

James

Autobiographical. Like a journal. Not meant to be shared.

CURT

Could I see some of it?

James is speechless.

CURT (CONT'D)

Music is meant to be shared.

INT. JAMES'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

Curt enters slowly, while looking around speechless. He has same wonder in his eyes as the children entering Wonka's chocolate factory.

James (CONT'D)

Laura put it all together. She thought it would make the place more "me".

CURT

This place is wild.

James

It's just a few of the songs. Mostly Laura's favorites.

CURT

Wow. (beat) Sorry, I can't get over this. You are one talented motherfucker.

James

Mmm... Thanks.

CURT

And this all started when?

James

From around first grade.

CURT

You know when I wrote my first song?

James

When?

CURT

I'll let you know when it happens.

Curt continues to read the walls.

CURT (CONT'D)

Damn. I envy you.

James

This is just how I vent. Some of these are just nonsense. But I can read them or hear the notes and they

spark these memories... Like it's happening... (looks at Curt) Anyway, should we head back?

CURT

I want to hear these, James. I want to hear them all. It's so rare to possess a unique voice. All my life I've only done covers.

James

People like covers.

CURT

But I'm not exactly reinventing the wheel. I would love to play stuff like this.

Curt motions to the walls. Beat.

CURT (CONT'D)

So how about it?

James

You want to play my music?

CURT

I'm tired of playing the same shit everyone knows. I'm waiting for the day when I can play a song for the first time and no one sings along. They just... listen.

James

That's kind of weird, isn't it?

CURT

I guess, but I think that's why I like it.

James

Yeah. (long beat) I think I like it too.

James quickly scans the wall and pulls one of the pages off of the bottom.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Here, start with this one.

James hands Curt the paper. RISE headlines it.

CURT

RISE...

James

I always said if I had a band, this would be on the set list. Everything's there. Just promise me you'll do something crazy with it.

CURT

We'll have some fun with it.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

Laura looks at the missing paper spot on the wall.

LAURA

Why didn't you give him the copy from your closet?

JAMES

It was kind of spur of the moment. And I have no idea how you organized all of that back there.

LAURA

I suppose we can replace it with the copy.

A beat. Laura lets out an annoyed grunt.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Is this the change you were looking for?

JAMES

I don't know. I figured if I just push myself and do things differently, I'd have to adapt.

Laura signs.

LAURA

Well, it's done now. I liked that song.

JAMES

It's still my song. It's just another way of getting it out there. I can still play it.

LAURA

Then play it.

JAMES

Okay.

James reaches over and grabs his guitar from the stand. He begins to play. As James is about to sing, Laura puts her finger on his lips to hush him.

JAMES

Oh, you know it? (she nods) Okay.

He continues to play as she sings his song. (If you need a song here to imagine in the meantime, go for "The Moon Song" by Karen O). One verse and chorus or so. 1 minute.

INT. JoEllen's HOME - DAY

James is laying on the couch in the therapist routine. (DP: Cam overhead) JoEllen pours herself a cocktail at the nearby bar, then returns to the stool placed in front of the couch.

JoEllen

Why do you put yourself in these positions?

James

I don't know...

JoEllen

You have to play for tips. Play. Do you know what that means?

James

I need the money.

JoEllen

It's not the money. No one paid you to play at that party. You're trying too hard to be like Curt.

James

I know I don't have what he has. That's fine.

JOELLEN

Oh, well you're cured then. I am really good at this!

JAMES

No, I mean if this doesn't work and I never go on stage... I could be okay with that. There's a place for songwriters.

JOELLEN

Sure!

JAMES

It's a respectable career.

JOELLEN

Yeah!

JAMES

Better than being a paper boy.

JOELLEN

Totally!

JAMES

Yeah!

JOELLEN

Then why were you trying to hard?

JAMES

I didn't know another way to get this music out of my head.

JOELLEN

So Curt is that answer for you. Is he your voice now?

JAMES

No, that's just one song.

JOELLEN

Why not another?

JAMES

He didn't ask for another.

JOELLEN

And if he does?

JAMES

I might see where it goes.

JOELLEN

I guess that's something you'll have to find out on your own then.

JAMES

You're not going to tell me what to do?

JOELLEN

No. Is that what you think I do?

JAMES

You've been doing that since we've met.

JOELLEN

Since you're so obedient, bring your guitar next time. I want to keep it here.

JAMES

Why?

JOELLEN

Call it an exercise of desire. Who's going to miss it?

JAMES

I don't know.

JOELLEN



How about you?

JAMES

Oh, right.

JOELLEN

You need to remember that you're number one in your life, okay?

JAMES

Okay.

JOELLEN

Say it.

JAMES

I'm number one.

JOELLEN

Like you mean it.

JAMES

(loud voice)

I'M NUMBER ONE.

JOELLEN

Okay! Now, who else is gonna hunt me down if I never give back your guitar? Mom? Dad?

JAMES

No, not dad. He died when I was nine.

JOELLEN

How did he die?

JAMES

He... (struggles) I don't want to talk about it.

JOELLEN

I know you don't, but this is where you get into things like that.

JAMES

Not right now, please.

James is very uncomfortable. Long beat.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

We've been here long enough for today. I imagine it's a long story and I'm not making you dinner.

James nods rapidly.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

Next time then.

James nods.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

Sam is sitting in a robe in a chair. James sits nearby on the couch reading the paper. TV's on.

James

(to paper)

Why am I still doing this?

SAM

(to TV)

I don't have the slightest idea.

JAMES

I'm a child. Look at me. I'm a thirty year old paper boy.

SAM

Paper man.

James tosses the paper.

James

I'm serious!

SAM

Keep it down. Miranda's in the back.

James looks to the back, then back at Sam.

JAMES

You're breaking your rules.

SAM

What rules?

JAMES

You said you were done with new friends.

SAM

I said a lot of stuff. (beat) Come on, that's a ridiculous rule to live by.

JAMES

How long has she been sober?

SAM

Like a month or two.

James

Wow. A month or two.

SAM

I was there before. Two months is an accomplishment. A huge accomplishment.

James

I take it she has sturdy moral support at home?

Sam stops cleaning and looks at James as if you say, "Come on."

JAMES (CONT'D)

The only reason I ask is because I was here day one. Month one. And every month after. And you're

right, it is a huge accomplishment to get to that point, but it takes a lot more than sitting alone marking off days on a calendar to get to the point you're at now.

They both go quiet as Miranda walks in from the back room near the end of his speech. Her wrinkled clothes tell a story of a long night.

SAM

James, you remember Miranda.

Miranda

(To James)

Hey.

James nods.

Miranda

(To Sam)

I gotta jet to work. Call me later though, okay?

SAM

Yeah, of course.

Sam walks her to the door. A kiss. James audibly sighs. She briefly looks back at James. Nonjudgmental. She leaves.

SAM

She's got me, okay?

James

I guess you know what you're doing. (beat) You do know what you're doing...

SAM

Yeah, Jimmy, I know. I know what I'm doing.

James

Cause it's the last thing any of us want. For you to...

SAM

I know what I'm doing.

EXT. James'S APARTMENT AREA - NIGHT

James comes home to his apartment to find Curt hanging out next door outside with his band mates LIAM, BEN, and JASON.

CURT

Hey, James!

Curt motions James over.

CURT (CONT'D)

This is Liam, Ben, and Jason. This is James. He's the songwriter.

Warm greetings and thanks are given from our band members.

James

(awkward)

Not a big deal. Just one song.

CURT

Yeah, yeah.

James

Alright. Well, I've been at it all day. It was nice to meet you all. I'm a big fan.

James goes for the joke, but they must've heard it sincerely before. No reaction. They wave and say goodbyes. James walks away. Curt follows.

CURT

Hold up, can I talk to you for a sec?

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

CURT is admiring the wall art.

CURT

We're doing a lot with that song. People love it.

James

That's good. I want people to hear it.

CURT

I mention you at every show. I hope that's okay.

JAMES

What? Yeah, of course.

He turns back to James.

CURT

How would you feel if we took it a step further?

James begins to show his nerves as he did the first night they talked.

JAMES

How so?

CURT

I want to stop playing these heartless covers and play your music exclusively. This will make you a part of the band.

JAMES

The songwriter isn't part of the band.

CURT

I can get you a cut of our earnings, which isn't much, but it's something.

James isn't moved by the offer.

CURT (CONT'D)

We're going to rename the band.

JAMES

To what?

CURT

Chelere.

James takes a moment. A smile peeks through.

CURT (CONT'D)

It stands out, its different - and with your music behind it, people will know the name. I think we could build something together.

JAMES

Why do you think this'll work?

CURT

I can't think of a reason why this wouldn't work.

A wide shot of the room covered in music.

JAMES

The last time I was in a band was just me and my brother.

CURT

What was the name?

James

Pizza Party.

Beat.

CURT

That's not a bad name.

James

I know, right?

CURT (CONT'D)

So let's make it official across the board. Otherwise, I'll take Pizza Party, cause that'll be the only gigs we'll be able to get.

James breaks away from the conversation and begins to pick off papers from the wall. He goes to his bookshelf and goes through the notebooks. He comes across a newspaper article about his car accident. He puts it aside. He hands the songs to Curt.

JAMES

How about twelve songs, plus the one you have.

CURT

Lucky number thirteen.

JAMES

And these will compliment one another.

CURT

I don't know what to say. Thank you Mr. Chelere. Every 1st Tuesday we'll be playing at the Venue. Come by sometime.

James

Yeah, maybe.

Curt hugs James then pats him on the arm. Curt walks out of the apartment, and with the door still open, turns to his band and holds up the papers.

CURT

We're Chelere!

Off screen, the band celebrates with cheers and clinking beer bottles. Curt laughs and smiles as he points at James before he reaches for the door and closes it.

James picks up the newspaper spread containing the article about the accident. The headline reads "Child survives deadly accident thanks to first responder". A murky black and white photo poorly details the scene of the accident.

INT. JoEllen'S HOME - DAY

Dialogue starts over the scene before and carries into this scene. James is lying on the couch.

James

Days after Christmas, we were coming home from Texas. My dad was driving. My mom in the passenger seat; Sam and I in the back. Sam was sleeping. I had our six month old puppy named "Butch" by my side, also asleep. I had a guitar in my lap - child's size. Gift from the grandfolks. I had been playing since we hit the road. He told me to stop, but I didn't. Mom told him to take it easy. He ignored her, and decided to turn around and look at me and let me know he meant business. We locked eyes, then bam. (James claps). Car pulled out in front of us and we hit it - full speed, no brakes. I came to and my dog was clawing the shit out of me, trying to climb out. It leaped out of a broken window and got run over by a passing car. Sam didn't have a scratch on him. Dad died. Mom stayed in the



hospital for weeks - major head trauma and a broken arm. You wouldn't know any of it from reading that article though.

Sounds and brief cutaways of the accident throughout. JoEllen is overlooking the article while listening. Tears.

James (CONT'D)

It only talks about the infant from the other car - How it flew out the window and into the field - like something out of a tall tale. He lived though. (beat) My dad didn't. No mention of that.

JoEllen

Every part of this... every mistake that was made... None of it was because of you.

James

But if I had just stopped...

JoEllen

Nothing would have changed. There are things that happen that are outside of your control.

James

He was a good driver, Jo. He could have swerved or hit the brakes.

JoEllen

It was beyond your control.

James

Fine, but it's my fault that Dad couldn't do anything about it.

JoEllen

Why would you still play music at all, if that were true?

James

I don't know.

JoEllen

If you caused that accident simply by playing music - Then you need to stop playing music. I'm surprised a tanker truck hasn't come barreling through your living room every time you pluck a string.

James gets up and walks away from JoEllen.

James

Don't fuck with me right now.

JoEllen gets up and follows.

JoEllen

I can't be the first person to tell you that you're crazy for thinking any of that was your fault.

James

I could have made a difference.

JoEllen

That's life, James. You make thousands of decisions in a day. There's no going back on any of those.

James

I just want that one decision back.

James closes his eyes as tears squeeze through.

JoEllen

That's not an option. And it'll never be one.

JoEllen looks to her pictures.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

We all have things we want to change. Things we want... to forget. So we have to try to forget the best we can. Cause you can't live with that kind of regret in your life. (very long beat) I guess we're done for the day.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - SAME NIGHT

James arrives. Sam is on the porch.

JAMES

Here's the keys.

James turns around to leave.

SAM

Hey, hold up. Let's hang out.

James looks tired and like he's been crying. Mostly because he's tired and was crying.

SAM (CONT'D)

Oh, she really got into you, didn't she?

INT. RESTAURANT - SAME NIGHT

SAM

Dad was pissed at me.

James looks up at Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)

On the way out that day, I swiped a candy bar from the gas station and he busted me.

JAMES

What did he do?

SAM

Nothing. He was disappointed. I was too, I guess. I didn't see him do it, but he said he paid for it. "What if you had gotten caught?". What if... (beat) Don't keep asking "What if?". Stick to "What Now?"

JAMES

What now?

SAM

That's what you need to tell yourself. There's a lot of regret sewn throughout your lyrics. When's the last time you wrote a song?

JAMES

Just the other day.

SAM

And when's the last time you wrote a song that wasn't about regret?

JAMES

Maybe the last time I wrote a song about Laura.

SAM

Keep those, but forget about the other ones. You ever write about me?

JAMES

No.

SAM

Oh, I see how it is.

JAMES

No, it's nothing personal. I write my decisions and regrets. I've never had a regret when it came to you. The answer was just... obvious.

SAM

Does that mean I'm predictable?

JAMES

It means you're dependable. Even when I was seeing you through your worst times - I knew there wasn't another choice to make. I worry Laura's going to outgrow me. That my music is going to die with me. But I don't write about you, because I don't worry about you.

SAM

Mom worries. Dad worried, obviously, that I'd grow up to be some criminal. He was right if we count possession.

JAMES

Are you worried?

SAM

About you?

JAMES

About you.

SAM

Yeah, I worry. I carry this chip because temptation is everywhere. I've had relapses. You were there.

JAMES

But I wasn't worried.

SAM

That's good. You've got enough to think about as it is. I hope you never write a song about me.

JAMES

I will eventually. Cause I'm done writing about regret.

EXT. Streets - SAME NIGHT

James is riding his bike back home from his brother's house. In the camera frame and in focus is a CHELERE poster advertising their live play. Out of focus: James passes it up, then - SCREEECH. He stops the bike, hops off, then runs to the poster and pulls it off the wall. He is beyond excited. People are finally going to know who he is.

EXT. SAM'S PLACE - DAY

James arrives at Sam's place. Miranda's car is parked nearby. Sam's keys are in the front door of the house. James unlocks the door, removes them, and enters.

INT. SAM'S PLACE - SAME DAY

James walks into an empty place. No breakfast has been made. No coffee in the pot. James leans at the bedroom door to talk through it.

James

Hello? I'm stealing your car!

The door opens just enough for Miranda to squeeze her face through. She covers herself up, and she looks like she hasn't slept in days. They talk to each other the way you do when someone is sleeping in the other room.

MIRANDA

Shhh. He's still asleep.

James

I just need to ask him if I can borrow the car.

MIRANDA

Just take it, I'll drive him if he needs to go somewhere.

James

He's supposed to work later. Are you gonna take him?

MIRANDA

I'll take him.

James

Well just make sure he gets up in time.

MIRANDA

I will!

Miranda closes the door. James watches it close. He jiggles the keys in his hand, then walks out.

EXT. Outside JoEllen's HOME, STREET - SAME DAY

James arrives at JoEllen's house. She is sitting in a fold out chair in her front yard with James' guitar case. He gets out of the car.

JAMES

What the hell is this?

JOELLEN

Are you missing your guitar, yet?

JAMES

I'm getting by.

JOELLEN

Lie to me and tell me you're missing it like you're supposed to be.

JAMES

Alright. I'm missing it.

JOELLEN

You get to play it today.

JAMES

Why?

JOELLEN

I figured you'd be more excited than that. Here, take it.

JoEllen hands James the guitar case.

JAMES

You want me to play right here?

JOELLEN

No, there.

She points at the car.

JAMES

Oh, I see what you're doing.

JOELLEN

Go.

JAMES

I'm not doing that.

JOELLEN

The iron is hot, James! What do we do when the iron is hot?

JAMES

Strike.

JOELLEN

Strike!

She punches one hand into the other.

JOELLEN

Now go. GO.

She pushes him to the car.

INT. SAM'S CAR - SAME DAY

James is in the back seat. JoEllen is in the front passenger sitting backwards. Jo turns the key to power on the car (Sound: Ding Ding) so she can bring down all of the windows. Once all completely open, then she turns off the car. A moment passes.

JAMES

It's still hot in here.

JOELLEN

Just play.

JAMES

Is your car in the shade?

JOELLEN

I don't have a car. Now pluck a string.

James plucks a low E (bottom string).

JAMES

Why don't you have a car?

JOELLEN

Cause I don't need one. Pluck another string.

James plucks the A string (5th string).

JAMES

Is this working for you?

JOELLEN

Is it working for you? Pluck another string.

James plucks another string.

JAMES

I'm just plucking strings.



James runs his fingers aggressively on the strings.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Anyone can do that.

JOELLEN

Play something I know.

JAMES

What do you know?

JOELLEN

Something popular.

James thinks for a moment. He begins to play a familiar Beatles tune for about 4-5 seconds.

JOELLEN

Why aren't you hesitating?

James stops playing.

JAMES

It's a Beatles song.

JoEllen takes a moment.

JOELLEN

And you don't care about it. But your music - It's like reading your thoughts, isn't it? (beat) You don't need to play your music for me, but I'm starting to know who you are.

JAMES

I don't know much about you.

JOELLEN

You don't drive all the way over here to hear about me.

JAMES

I have questions.

JOELLEN

I'm sure you do. But you and I - We're here for you. Let's focus on that, okay?

JAMES

Okay. (beat) But can we do that inside?

JOELLEN

Yeah, I'm burning up.

JAMES

Thank God.

They quickly exit the car.

EXT. SAM'S RENTAL HOME - SAME DAY

James parks the car in Sam's driveway. He gets out of the car, tosses the keys up and catches them. Miranda's car is gone. James approaches the door and puts in the key.

James

(Loudly)

Sam. You here?

He knocks on the door. No answer. He turns the key and enters.

James

(Loud)

Hello-elo-elo-elo?

James opens Sam's fridge and grabs a bottle of water. He takes out his cellphone and calls Sam. He hears the cellphone ring in the other room. He looks up at the door to Sam's room.

James

You better not be skipping work.

James pushes open the door. The cellphone continues to ring. Sam is laying on his mattress, face-down, with a sheet covering him from his lower back to the back of his knees.

James

You're supposed to be at work.

James ends the call and takes a drink as he watches his brother lie there. He lowers the drink slowly.

James

Sam?

James takes a step, then suddenly recognizes the situation and rushes to Sam, dropping the water bottle in the process.

James

SAM!

James kneels down and flips Sam over. His skin is dry and pale. He lifts his neck up to give him a hug, then pulls away to look at his face.

James

Sam... Please, no, Sam.

James buries his head onto Sam. Nearby there are pills by his sobriety coin. Cue the music.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

The music is "A Song For John". Lyrics haven't begun yet.

Laura stands with JoEllen away from the crowd. Joellen watches James with his mother.

James

(sign language)

[I love you. I've missed you.]

JoEllen

She's deaf.

LAURA

Since the accident.

Beat.

LAURA

Before you met him, he used to smile more.

JOELLEN

He's realizing he wasn't happy.

LAURA

What are you saying?

JOELLEN

It's not about you. He has things he needs to work out. He's needs to move forward.

LAURA

He's changing.

JOELLEN

It's not a bad thing.

Music continues.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James is on the edge of his bed still wearing his suit. He is aggressively hammering out chords and singing with his eyes closed.

James

(singing)

But you don't have to see what you did to me and everyone who ever knew you // We miss you so greatly. Hope you miss us too. I promise you, we'll never forget you.

While he plays, cut to Curt sitting against the other side of the wall calmly listening. James opens his eyes. Tears that were held within finally fall down his face.

INT. JOELLEN'S HOME - DAY

James is sitting at her table. JoEllen walks in from the hall.

JOELLEN

I guess you won't let me keep it forever.

JoEllen puts the guitar case by the door.

JAMES

Thanks, Jo.

JOELLEN

Feeling inspired?

JAMES

No. I just wanted it back.

JOELLEN

Ah.

JAMES

I have more than one guitar, you know.

JOELLEN

You son of a bitch.

Jo smiles to lighten the mood. Beat.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

The funeral was nice.

JAMES

Are we gonna make this into session?

JOELLEN

This is just a friendly visit.

James grins and shakes his head.

JAMES

Are we friends?

JOELLEN

Why not?

JAMES

The flyer didn't mention you were looking for friends. Is this your way of finding new friends? Is social media too complicated?

JOELLEN

I am not your target.

JAMES

If this isn't a session, I'm going. Fuck this friends bullshit.

James gets out of his chair, followed by JoEllen.

JoEllen

You can snap at me all day, but you'll discover that I'm a goddamn rock.

JAMES

Is that right?

JOELLEN

Now sit your ass down.

JAMES

So it's a session now.

James takes a seat, then JoEllen.

JOELLEN

Let's get real. We can talk about Sam, or how Laura is not a factor in your success.

JAMES

What the hell does that mean?

JOELLEN

Laura doesn't want you to change.

JAMES

Fuck you.

JOELLEN

For you to change, you need to do it yourself.

JAMES

You don't know her. You met her one time for like two minutes and now you think you know everything.

JOELLEN

It's normal for her to feel that way.

JAMES

What do you know about normal? You're a fucking hermit with your creepy pictures and a messy house.

JOELLEN

Are you done?

JAMES

And I've never seen another soul walk in or out of this place. Who's in therapy here, me or you?

JOELLEN

Are you done?

Beat.

JAMES

You know what?

James get up from the table and grabs his guitar.

James

I might be.

He leaves.

EXT. SAM'S APARTMENT - Evening

James carries another box to the trash and tosses it in. Laura follows with another box.

LAURA

Hold it open.

James holds the trash open as she tosses in her box. He closes it. While close, she hugs James and holds his head in her shoulder.

LAURA

What do you want to do now?

JAMES

I'll just head home.

LAURA

Its not late.

JAMES

It's not that.

Short beat.

LAURA

Let's be together right now.

James nods while his head hangs low.

JAMES

What do you want to do?

LAURA

Let's walk.

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAME NIGHT

Laura and James are walking along the sidewalk downtown. A few montage shots gets us to the outdoor eatery where James is finally smiling. (Possible location: North Blvd. Park downtown).

EXT. OUTDOOR EATERY - SAME NIGHT

Laura and James and sitting at an outdoor table.

GOAL: Introduce moving away. James must agree and lock it in.

LAURA



There's that smile.

JAMES

Do you have to point it out?

LAURA

It's a rare sighting! With everything going on, I figured I'd never see it again.

JAMES

I guess you bring out the best in me.

Laura reaches over the table and takes James's hand.

LAURA

Are you ready to move away from here?

JAMES

Why?

LAURA

To change everything. I can work and you stay home and write music.

JAMES

You're trying to give me more of the same when I need something different. Don't you want me to be a better person?

LAURA

If you need that, that's fine, but I'm happy either way. But there's no better time to leave than now.

JAMES

You're right about that. You're serious?

LAURA

Yeah.

JAMES

Fine. (beat) Let's do it. Anywhere. But I should do something before we go. What time is it?

LAURA

Past 10.

JAMES

Curt's band is playing a few blocks away.

LAURA

Do you want to go?

JAMES

Do you think I could get in for free?

ext. VENUE - same night

Just outside of the venue, Laura and James wait in a short line. The sound is blasting inside.

JAMES

Does that sound like Rise?

She shrugs as they approach the doorman.

DOORMAN

How many?

James

Two.

DOORMAN

Eighteen.

Almost sounds like a question.

James

I'm thirty.

DOORMAN

Nah, nine a piece to get in. Eighteen bucks.

James

I'm James Chelere. As in the band Chelere.

DOORMAN

Oh yeah?

James

Yeah.

DOORMAN

You're in the band?

James

No, but the band is named after me.

DOORMAN

Why is the band named after you?

James

I wrote the songs.

DOORMAN

Oh, alright, good for you. Eighteen bucks.

A short face off. A frustrated Laura reaches into the purse and pays.

LAURA

Here's a twenty.

DOORMAN

Alright, I'll need to see ID.

This earns another ugly look from James.

INT. VENUE - SAME NIGHT

The crowd is alive here in the venue. Curt and the band are dominating the room. RISE is barely recognizable. Curt sees James in the crowd and points at him.

CURT

Chelere!

The crowd roars for the band. No one looks at James despite Curt points directly at him. The music fades and numbs within James' head. A direct shot of James' face as he looks around and finally up to Curt. Envy. Sadness. CUT TO:

INT. VENUE - Later that same night

The crowd has dispersed aside from a few groupies standing near the stage talking to Curt and the band. James and Laura are standing at the bar. This has become a drinking night for James. A man, GABE LARSON, approaches wearing casual attire, but everything about him is sharp and clean. James remains sober enough for regular conversation, though this drunk state is showing gradually more and more.

GABE

Hey, sorry to interrupt - James: Hi. Gabe Larson.

Gabe holds out his hand.

James

You're the only one that knows I'm here.

Laura shakes Gabe's hand.

LAURA

I'm Laura.

GABE

A pleasure. (To James) I was wrong about you. Your voice - it exists in your writing. Look what it's done for them.

Gabe hands James a local magazine. "Who's who in Baton Rouge. Featuring the next best musicians, artists and writers." James holds on to it after seeing the cover page.

GABE (CONT'D)

This is just one example of the buzz they're getting.

JAMES

Who are you?

GABE

I'm here to work with the band. You have a lot to do with their success.

James

But they're a cover band.

GABE

And that's why we need you on board.

Curt approaches. Gabe shakes Curt's hand with excitement.

GABE (CONT'D)

Hey Curt, marvelous!

LAURA

Great show, Curt.

CURT

Thank you. (to James) This is the guy that makes it all possible.

Curt puts his arm around James, but James violently shakes it off. The alcohol is more apparent now. James stands up and gets two arms distance between himself and the group.

James

You never told me the band was this big - This popular.

James hold up the magazine.

CURT

What?

LAURA

(To James)

Calm down.

James

(To Curt)

What are you doing to me?

CURT

What do you mean?

James

We never discussed all of this!

GABE

(To James)

This is gonna to change your life.

James

(To Curt)

Those are my words... and you're... massacring them.

CURT

Nothing's changed, James. Take it easy.

James

My words. (shouting) I SHOULD BE SAYING MY OWN WORDS UP THERE! Not you. ME!

James points at Curt.

James (CONT'D)

You're not allowed... No, I forbid you to sing any of that again.

LAURA

James, stop!

Laura approaches James. As she does, he backs away from her, turns around and heads out.

INT. JAMES'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James sits in his apartment. It's dark, except for a light on the Who's who magazine he's reading. He reads the article about Curt's band, Chelere. Highlight a few sentences:

"...odd name, good band..."

"Curt Cappelle leads..."

That kind of stuff. James, frustrated, flips through the book in anger. The pages fall onto a local writer named Karen Bridges. Her picture is JoEllen.

"Her next book, Ready For A Change? is due next year."

EXT. JoEllen'S HOME - DAY

James knocks aggressively on the door. JoEllen answers. James is holding the magazine up with her article exposed. She takes a moment.

JOELLEN

Do you want me to sign it?

JAMES

What the fuck is this...

JOELLEN

That is a bad picture of me.

James maintains a stone face.

JOELLEN (CONT'D)

I suppose you could come in then.

James walks past her and gives her the magazine.

INT. JOELLEN'S HOME - DAY

James comes in; stops; sighs. Various blocking here.

JOELLEN

Oh look, I'm a "who's who".

James

Why did you lie to me?

JoEllen

Lie about what?

James

Being a therapist.

JoEllen

Oh that. Well, it's because I'm an author. Didn't you read the article?

James, feeling fragile, looks to and from at his hands and JoEllen while he talks.

James

I trusted you with a lot of information about me, Jo. I thought we were friends.

JoEllen

When you first walked in that door, we weren't anything. I didn't know what we'd end up being. I was careful to make sure I never called myself a therapist. The truth is: You are the only person I've gotten to help. And helping you has been a pleasure, James, it has, and our time will end up in my next book.

James

You know everything about me.

JoEllen

I never use real names.

JAMES

What's your pen name?

JOELLEN

Karen Bridges.

JAMES

Sounds fake.

JOELLEN

It is fake. (beat) But your story isn't. And that could help someone.

James walks across the room and puts a hand on the top of the piano to support himself.

James

Between everything with Sam, and Curt... I just have nothing left for you.

James turns to JoEllen.



JoEllen

Did something happen?

James

Yeah... (long beat) Goodbye, Jo.

James exits.

INT. JAMES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

James sits at the edge of his bed. He looks at his guitar. Deep breath as a decision is made. He picks up his guitar from the stand.

INT. DAILY GRIND - NIGHT

James walks in with his guitar. Barry is behind the counter. He waves James over. Gabe is sitting at a table with coffee and a newspaper.

Barry

Hey James! Came back to us after making it big out there.

James is confused.

BARRY (CONT'D)

I'm proud of you! Good to hear you're doing it big.

Long beat.

JAMES

Fuck off, Barry.

James walks out of the door.

EXT. PARKING LOT OF THE DAILY GRIND - SAME NIGHT

James leans against Sam's car. He is on the verge of tears, but wards them off with anger and obscenities. Gabe comes by.

GABE

James.

James takes a deep breath and hides his emotions.

JAMES

Mr. Larson. Sorry about the other night.

GABE

I need you to understand what I'm trying to do here.

JAMES

I know what you're trying to do.

GABE

Oh? Enlighten me.

JAMES

You want to take my life's work and reduce it to radio fodder. Before that, you'll tell me I'll be paid the same amount as all beginners get paid. That'll cover rent for a few months and I will have paid for your new house in Malibu.

GABE

I'm not buying a house in Malibu. I hate the beach.

James rolls his eyes.

GABE (CONT'D)

Now, here's the part where you hear me out. I want to sign you as a songwriter.

JAMES

I have to be a performer.

GABE

But you're not a performer.

JAMES

I'm almost there. I know it.

GABE

You had the time and talent to get there. But you're not there. Your writing is the only thing ready for the next step. You have a lot of work ahead of you if you want to perform.

JAMES

Then let me do the work.

GABE

You don't need anyone's permission to do the work! But you can be a legitimate songwriter right now - if you want to be.

JAMES

So I just say yes and that's it?

GABE

That's a big part of it. It's happening here. You just have to stick around.

INT. BACK STAGE AT A VENUE - NIGHT

Curt and James are having a chat. The dull sound of a crowd can be heard. Between them, it's quiet. Awkward.

JAMES

This is all new to me.

CURT

Okay.

JAMES

How does he even know about you?

CURT

It's his job.

Beat.

JAMES

What are you gonna play tonight?

Curt sighs.

CURT

Is that why you came down here?

JAMES

No. I think I know the answer to that. I need to know if Mr. Larson is the real deal.

CURT

He is.

JAMES

Okay. And it's just paper on the walls. That's all it is.

Curt watches James work it out.

JAMES

Do I have charisma?

CURT

Sure you do...

James works it out. Blocking all around the room.

JAMES

No. You belong out there. I don't. That's okay. Yeah. That's okay. At least there's a place for me, right? I'm not just gonna be some guy with a dream. I get to write and work with talented people. No more delivering papers.

CURT

That's right.

JAMES

You seem so calm. Why are you calm?

CURT

This is what I want.

JAMES

Weren't you ever afraid you weren't gonna make it?

CURT

No.

JAMES

I guess that's another way were different.

CURT

You gotta believe in yourself. You've got power that you don't even know about. People say "its just a song"; you listen and its over. Next track. They (pointing beyond curtain) recognize the power of a song.

James looks toward the crowd.

CURT (CONT'D)

When those people fall down, it'll be your words that pick them back up.

Curt gets up on the stage.

CURT (CONT'D)

If you ever fall down, just read your own lyrics.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

James stands in front of his wall of music. Very short montage of reading leading to a final moment. He reads from the pages

JAMES

All will be well. All will be well.

INT. TEMP STUDIO OFFICE - SAME DAY

James is thumbing through legal papers in a modern business office. Gabe is scrolling through his phone. They sit with a desk between them.

James

It says that I won't be credited as a writer.

GABE

It's not freelance. You'll be part of the writing staff in the studio.

James

What the hell is that about?

Gabe puts down the phone.

GABE

People associate the artists with the lyrics in the songs. You think Taylor Swift wrote every single one of those songs?

James

I should be credited for my work!

GABE

This is the deal. Curt said you were in.

James

He's not going to sign without me.

GABE

Curt's in. He signed his papers this morning. You've got talent. But so do a lot of other people.

James

What about the band name? People will know I'm involved.

GABE

The band's gone. That name is terrible. He's a solo act. If you're having trouble deciding, think of the money.

JAMES

It's about more than money.

GABE

Is it though? They're just words on a page. Here's your options. Keep doing what you're doing. Or, sign this, sell your music, and start your life.

James thinks for a moment, then signs.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

James and Laura are sitting at the outdoor eatery once again.

JAMES

I lost my temper. You know that wasn't about you, right?

LAURA

I know. Forget them. Let's just stick to the plan.

JAMES

What plan?

LAURA

To get away. I'm ready.

JAMES

You were serious about that?

LAURA

Yeah.

James gets very uncomfortable.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I've got us a place close to the hospital. The GM there is really nice and there's lots of [places for you to play]

Interrupts.

JAMES

Well, I can't go.

LAURA

Why can't you go?

JAMES

I'm needed here to write for Curt and Mr. Larson and it's not freelance. I'm finally making my dreams come true.

LAURA

It was never your dream to write for somebody else!

JAMES

Dreams change. Where are you going to anyway?

LAURA

Where am I going? I thought we would be going to San Francisco.

JAMES

Why San Francisco?

LAURA

I have opportunities there. You're pursuing a back up plan. That's not what you want.

JAMES

They're just words on a page.

LAURA

Wow. Really? You don't believe that.

JAMES

It's what they are. I'll be able to afford things with this job. You don't want a house someday? You don't want kids? I don't want to be spending your money the rest of my life.

LAURA

I don't care about money.

JAMES

That's cause you have it. I can finally do something with this useless music. I want to be successful.

LAURA

All of this success and you still don't smile. You're not happy.

JAMES

I'd be happy if you stayed.

LAURA

You'd be happy with the idea of me staying, but you wouldn't be happy.



JAMES

Then what are you going to do?

LAURA

I'll ask you once more: Will you come with me?

JAMES

I can't.

Laura hugs James. A kiss.

LAURA

I hope it works out for you.

Laura walks away and doesn't look back. James watches her leave.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James watches an act perform and applauds at the end. A woman approaches him and puts a hand on his shoulder.

JoEllen

I'm here to see James Chay-leer play, have you heard of him?

James turns to see JoEllen. She sits down at the table.

JAMES

What are you doing here?

JOELLEN

You're not the only one that needs a change.

JAMES

Okay, let's say we're friends.

JOELLEN

Okay.

JAMES

What is going on with you?

JOELLEN

What do you mean?

JAMES

The pictures, the shut in lifestyle... Is that something I can read about in your books?

JOELLEN

You could discover some things in the writing. You could read a bit about a 15 year old girl giving up a baby for adoption. Or you could read about all of her regrets leading up to being a successful author. But I think she only writes about other people's regrets now.

JAMES

Get your pen. I let Laura leave. I was suppose to go with her.

JOELLEN

Why didn't you?

James

I have an opportunity here. I just want to succeed. Sam would have wanted that too.

JoEllen

Not like this.

James

It's the right thing to do. I don't get a lot of opportunities.

JoEllen

You may have to wait a while, but there will be more. (beat) Do you want to be happy or do you want to be right?

James takes a moment.

JAMES

I want to be happy.

JOELLEN

Good. So what now?

JAMES

(to himself)

What now... What now?

James snaps his head up.

James

You can write your book. Just let people know what I chose.

James leaves the table and runs out of the front door. Barry and the crew watch him go.

JoEllen

(Shouting to James)

I didn't need your permission!

JoEllen is happy for him.

EXT. in James's car - same night

James jumps in the car. He pulls out his cellphone and makes a call.

James

Alright Mista' Gabe - I'm ready to deal.

INT. James'S APARTMENT - SAME NIGHT

James pulls down all of the art and papers and everything off the walls and puts them all into a plastic garbage bag. He picks up "Laura's Song" off a desk, then puts it back down.

James

Still not for sale.

INT. TEMP STUDIO - SAME NIGHT

James, bag in hand, walks down the hall of the temporary studio.

INT. TEMP STUDIO OFFICE - SAME NIGHT

James drops the bag on the table.

GABE

What's this?

James is energized!

James

It's my life in a bag! Every song I've ever written.

GABE

You don't have this on a flash drive?

James

Take it or leave it.

GABE

I'll take it.

James

Got the check?

Gabe pulls the check from a paper clip attached to the contracts. There is a post-it note on the contracts that says "James".

GABE

For your whole collection.

Gabe slides the papers forward along with the check.

GABE

We're gonna make some great music James...

Takes the check, and walks out immediately. Gabe stands up.

GABE

Hold up!

Gabe walks into the hallway and turns to see James leaving the building.

Fade to black.

INT. BACKSTAGE AT a different OPEN MIC NIGHT BAR - NIGHT

It's dark backstage here. James looks at his phone. New voice mails. He listens. It's Gabe.

GABE

It's Gabe Larson. I still haven't heard from you. I understand you don't want the job, but I was hoping you'd reconsider because you got some really good stuff here. It's not my cup of tea, but Curt is on fire with it and...

James hangs up the phone.

James

(to himself)

They're all yours.

ANOTHER ANNOUNCER

(to James)

Okay, you're up. Just introduce yourself.

James takes a deep breath. He looks behind him at a lit up exit sign. A nod. He looks back to the stage.

James emerges through the curtain to a very light audience. Low volume applause. James takes a seat.

James

Hi.

Cut to Laura in the crowd. Smiling, so proud.

James

My name is James Chelere. I just moved to San Francisco. (long beat) I like it here.

James takes a brief moment to see the new faces. Then, he leans slightly into the mic.

James

This is a new one.

END.

The song plays over credits - half screen credits, half picture. About 1 1/2 minutes.